

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Sicklefin Redhorse Conservation

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature

The Little Tennessee River runs wide and deep just below Emory Dam, outside Franklin North Carolina. In the late-morning sun on an April day, a Jon boat plied the water back and forth. Protruding from the bow and dropping into the water was a pair of electrodes wired to an on-board generator. Perched in the bow was a biologist with a long-handled net waiting to scoop up fish stunned by the electric current flowing through the water.

The effort was part of an ongoing project to conserve one of western North Carolina's rarest fish.

The sicklefin redhorse is a large fish found only in the western tip of North Carolina. It's rare and imperiled enough that it faces addition to the federal endangered species list, but a team of biologists is working to make that unnecessary. The fish were being collected from the Little Tennessee River to have their eggs collected and fertilized, then raised in captivity, which should dramatically reduce the mortality rate for the young fish which would eventually be returned to the water, boosting populations.

Boosting numbers is part of the equation – those fish also need quality habitat. Two years ago, the Dillsboro Dam on the Tuckasegee River was removed. The dam had prevented sicklefin redhorses from moving upstream, but this spring, for the first time, biologists documented sicklefins migrating upstream of the old dam site, into new territory.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.